



Montana University System
BOARD OF REGENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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EXHIBIT 3
DATE 2/11/2011
HB 452

February 11, 2011

Representative James Knox
Capitol Building
Helena, MT

Re: HB 451 & 452 – Elect the Board of Regents

Dear Representative Knox and Committee Members:

I am currently a member of the Board of Regents for the Montana University System, and write to offer comments on HB 451 & 452 – Elect the Board of Regents. I appreciate your interest in higher education, and the motivation of developing more accountability within the system. While appreciating your goals, I believe that amending the constitution to provide for the direct election of Regents would weaken the governance structure of the institution, make it more amenable to partisan politics, have any number of other unintended consequences and have little or no effect on improving accountability.

The first question we must ask plays on the old axiom, "If it's not broken, don't fix it." It is difficult to measure success and accountability in a large enterprise. Through our ongoing efforts to align shared policy goals and accountability measures with the Legislature (which has been done successfully), it has become overly apparent that the Montana University System (MUS) is one of the most efficient systems of higher education in the nation. Efficiency may not be the direct equivalent of accountability, but it certainly indicates many people are taking their job seriously.

Electing the Board of Regents would provide no more, and probably less accountability that we have now. I suggest less, in that an elected Regent may feel more bound by the promises made running for office than to the fiduciary duty imposed by the law. Each year one of the seven regents' terms expires, thus creating both long term stability, and annually bringing in a fresh perspective. This has served the Board and the people of the state very well.

We have a system that is working well. Certainly there are issues and various legislative audits have brought those to the fore. There will always be some areas that need improvement in a business the size of the university system, whether in private industry or in the university or government world. But the solution in a system that is working well is not to alter the structure, the solution is to roll up your sleeves, get the facts and solve the problem. Our system works well and I submit that the proposed legislation will not improve accountability or the system. I thank you for your consideration of these remarks.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Steve Barrett".

Steve Barrett
Montana Board of Regents